Smithsonian Folkways

HENRY COWELL

PIANO MUSIC

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SMITHSONIAN/FOLKWAYS SF 40801

Twenty pieces played by the composer
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Originally issued in 1963 as Folkways 3349
1993 introductory essay by Sorrel Hays

1. The Tides of Manaunaun 2:26
2. Exultation 1:48
3. Harp of Life 4:18
4. Lilt of the Reel 1:58
5. Advertisement (Third Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) 1:08
6. Antinomy (Fourth Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) 3:02
7. Aeolian Harp and Sinister Resonance 3:41
8. Anger Dance 1:52
9. The Banshee 2:31
10. Fabric 1:22
11. What's This (First Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) 0:57
12. Amiable Conversation (Second Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) 0:52
13. Fairy Answer 2:51
14. Jig 2:10
15. Snows of Fujiyama 2:20
16. Voice of Lir 3:06
17. Dynamic Motion 3:13
18. The Trumpet of Angus Og 3:24
19. Tiger 3:28
20. Henry Cowell's Comments 13:18
    (Henry Cowell describes each of the selections in the order in which they appear.)

Henry Cowell's music covers a wider range both in expression and technique than that of any other living composer. No other composer of our time has produced a body of work so radical and so normal.

Virgil Thomson, 1953

I want to live in the *whole world* of music.

Henry Cowell, 1955

Smithsonian Folkways

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings
Center for Folklife Programs
and Cultural Studies
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600
Smithsonian Institution
Washington DC 20560

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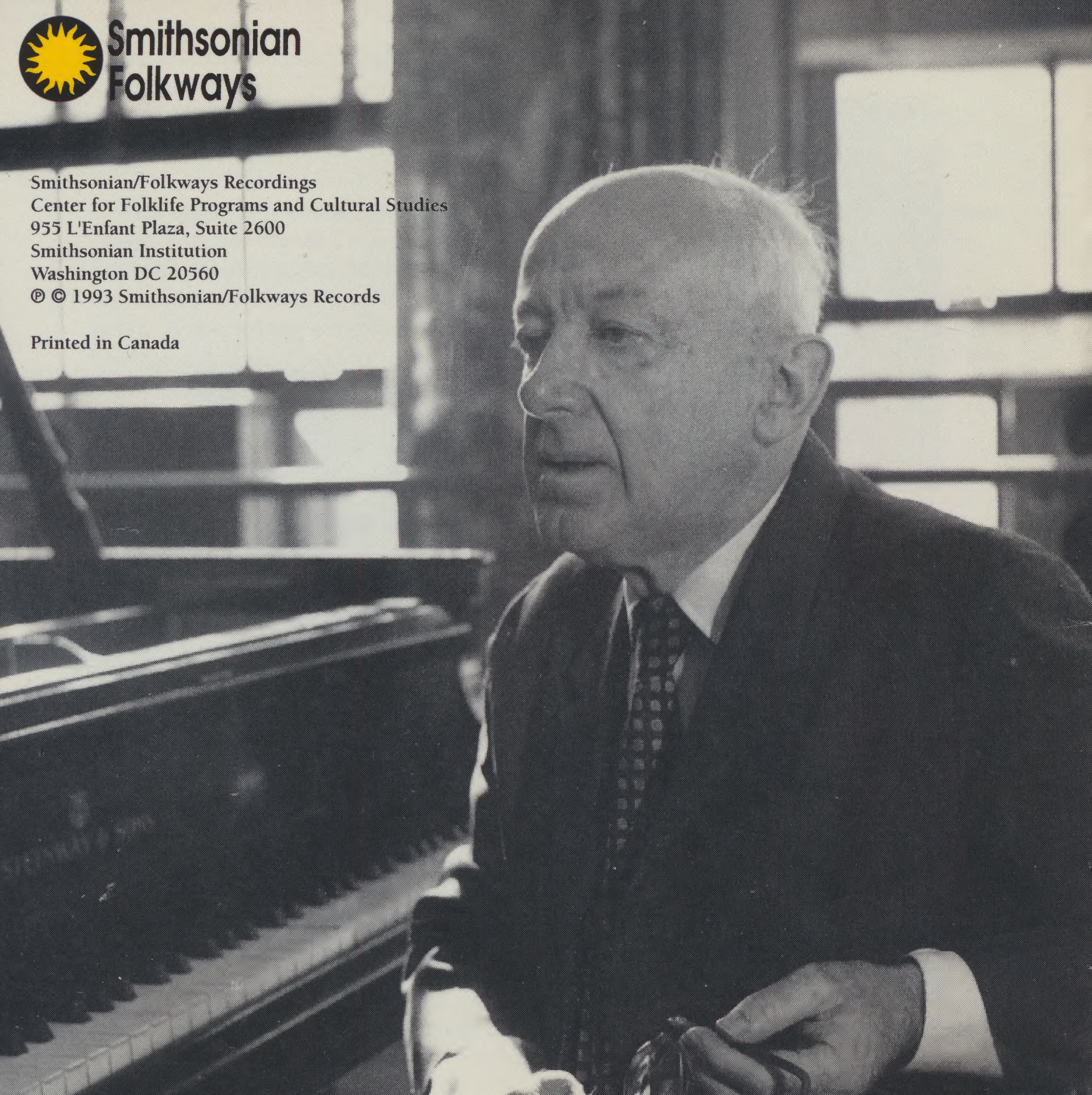

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Introduction to the 1993 Edition: The Legacy of Henry Cowell

When Henry Cowell (1897-1965) was a boy in the first years of the twentieth century, he invented ways to play the piano that no one had ever used. In this last decade of the century it is intriguing to consider how audiences have accepted, and composers continue to explore, the paths of musical invention Cowell summoned from his rich imagination.

TONE CLUSTERS

Sometimes new ideas are simply in the air, and composers arrive at similar uses of these ideas at about the same time: clashing adjacent tonalities (Stravinsky, Bartok, Ives, Cowell); noisy sounds (Ives, Ornstein, Antheil, Cowell); polyrhythms (Bartok, Stravinsky, Cowell); and folk elements assimilated in new structural and harmonic ways (Janáček, Bartok, Cowell). However, Henry Cowell has been the only twentieth-century composer to create a body of keyboard music that was path breaking in its use of tonal clusters. In 1788 František Kočžwara notated palm-played tonal groups to indicate the sound of canon or marching troops in *The Battle of Prague*. Charles Ives called for a length of board to play a large number of adjacent keys in his *Concord Sonata* (1910-1951). Béla Bartók asked Cowell's permission when he composed the "Night Music" of his *Out of Doors* suite (1926), using clusters as basic harmonic material. Charlie Chaplin, with his film *Modern Times* (and even earlier, the Futurists), embraced the clanking, clattering, grinding, and roaring of machines—the symbols of noise—as substance for art.

Cowell wrote most of his cluster piano pieces while very young. His *Trumpet of Angus Og* contains a child-like *platsch-platsching* of quiet palm clusters in constant scale passages ascending and descending the high treble. He subtitled this piece *The Spirit of Youth*. Clusters, and Cowell's notation for them, are an accepted technique in the vocabulary of composers writing today. One remarkable piece is Ann Silsbee's *Doors* (1976, performed by David Burge on Pro Viva LP recording Deutsche Austrophon ISPV 110). Silsbee creates an abstract three dimensional structure with clusters as periodic pillars, somewhat as Cowell hinted at in his *Piece for Piano Paris 1924*. In my own writing I like the chromatic cluster for its ability to astonish with swerves of harmonic surprise, particularly in *Sunday Nights*, which I recorded for Finnadar/Atlantic SR2-720. On that album, *Adoration of the Clash*, I played various manifestations of keyboard clusters from six composers, including Morton Feldman, who wrote short wispy pieces containing fingered clusters. Feldman's *Vertical Thoughts IV* (1963)

is typical of his original use of secundal harmony (minimal gestures with very soft dynamics) and events-in-space canvas. Ilhan Mimaroğlu (born 1926), in his *Rosa*, wrote cluster sounds as punctuating dramatic images from the life and death of political martyr Rosa Luxemburg.

Cowell frequently used clusters in an imagistic way, particularly in *The Tides of Manaunaun* with its pulsing cluster waves and in *Harp of Life*, my all-time favorite. *Harp of Life* employs the roaring capacity of arpeggiated two-forearm clusters to evoke a huge stringed instrument that spanned the Celtic universe. At the end of *Harp of Life*, one plays a cluster firmly, then silently depresses keys and releases the cluster. The depressed key strings reverberate with a ringing that is sweetly unpercussive. This is a compositional technique that Robert Schumann hinted at in *Carnaval* (1833-1835) and in *Papillons* (1829-1831). Cowell notated this sparingly, and no composer has used it yet in any systematic way.

Tone clusters can stop the flow of action; or they can allow movement in any harmonic direction. Since chromatic clusters are ambiguous as to scalar or harmonic structure, they could be used systematically as a structural germ for music, though no composer to date has done so. Jazz and rock musicians (notably Cecil Taylor and Frank Zappa) have incorporated clusters for their noisy aspects, and interrupting, stop-action cluster sound is a feature of the fusion rock of the 1980s. Russell Peck put jazz sounds into a Western art form with the violent keyboard clusters of *Suspended Sentence* (1973, Finnadar SR 2-720), which Peck calls "pornosonic... a trip down blind alleys."

It is twenty-five years since I first saw the piano scores of Henry Cowell. At the University of Wisconsin in Madison I searched through a faculty colleague's library and found the Associated Music Publisher collection of his music. I sat down at the piano, tromped my way through the clusters and fell in love. Here was a composer who happily combined melodies and noise! The rest of twentieth-century music made sense to me in the light of subsequent researches into Cowell's oeuvre: string piano, altered piano, secundal harmony, harmonically undifferentiated aggregates, flexible structures, and above all, the exploratory impulse. This adventuresomeness and willingness to gamble on the unknown are features of Cowell's activities that I share with many of my generation of composers. Cowell's kind of curiosity is at the core of the American pioneering spirit in art as it gradually moved away from the aesthetics and formalism of European culture.

Cowell made many tours around the United States, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. He was the first American pianist to tour Soviet Russia. His *Tiger* was first published in Russia in the twenties. Between 1968 and 1989 I performed some one thousand concerts featuring Henry Cowell's cluster pieces. From San Francisco to New York and Atlanta, Cologne, Munich, Zagreb, and Ystad, to Rotterdam and Lago di Garda—everywhere at least one member of the audience recalled seeing Cowell perform his music.

Cowell's cluster music is not as frequently played now as the rich material warrants. It requires a technique of palm, fist and forearm playing which most pianists do not take the time to learn. This is a pity, since mighty tone-cluster pieces such as *Harp of Life* reveal resonances, harmonic color and dynamic timbres that conventional finger technique does not. Playing cluster music, as the resonances accumulate in a kind of roiling sonic mud and cleanse themselves as the sediment settles, I feel a power to the piano that is like the mightiness of an organ, but organically profiled by percussive attack and natural tone decay. Wrapped up in the possibilities of massed clusters is the asymmetrical and irregular appearance and muting of overtones that give piano cluster noise its sculptural profile and internal rhythmic vitality.

EXPLORING SOUND

Cowell opened up many possibilities in his piano works that other composers have developed in quite different ways: for example, his use of a china darning egg rolled across piano strings and the plucking, stroking, strumming—what he called "string piano." Many composers since Cowell have used facets of piano string resonance, such as he did in *Aeolian Harp*, silently holding down keys, then strumming strings inside the piano, leaving the sound of the depressed keys to ring out. Or, as George Crumb (born 1929) has done, they have used plucking or damping of strings at certain nodal points in the overtone series above the fundamental pitch, as in Cowell's *Sinister Resonance*. John Cage used sympathetic resonance arising from higher pitch relationships to selected bass tones in his *Etudes australes* (1974-1975).

Cage, who studied with Cowell, also wrote the piquant *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano (1946-1948) that alter piano sound by inserting different materials between the strings. Our decade offers the MIDI Grand Piano as an electronic update on the altered piano. MIDI Grand circuitry connects traditional acoustic piano traditions with the vast new possibilities of electronic sound generation and processing. In the first recording of MIDI Grand music, *Soundbridge* (Opus One CD 152), Loretta Goldberg

performs the *Rhapsody* of Daria Semegen and my own *90s, A Calendar Bracelet*, on a Yamaha MIDI Grand linked to a Yamaha tone generator. Since the MIDI Grand can send commands to any device that accepts MIDI messages, the instrument may yield an untold number of aural configurations triggered by a pianist's fingertips, as long as composers will create for this new situation. The obvious next development for altered piano will be interactive MIDI Piano.

In *New Musical Resources* (Knopf, 1929) Cowell outlined his ideas on the overtone series as a basis for compositional procedures. He worked with Leon Theremin and others to create electromechanical devices that would allow him to produce the sounds and rhythmic overlays of his theories. With sophisticated small chip circuitry, later generations have pursued and broadened these ideas. Phill Niblock uses the overtone series in its macro aspects, delighting in the beat accumulations from slightly different adjacent pitches. Working in the idiom of sustained and slowly shifting adjacencies layered over each other, David First composed *The Laws of Gambling Gold* (1990, recorded by Loretta Goldberg on *Revolver*, 0.0. Discs #5 CD). *The Well-Tuned Piano* (1964), by LaMonte Young, uses a forty-eight-tone scale with altered piano tunings. Ruth Anderson (born 1928) created the tape piece *Pulse* for the healing effects on the human nervous system of beat phenomena from simultaneous sine tones.

Richard Hayman told me about a concert of his music in China in the late eighties. Richard, with his distinctive musical nose and entrepreneurial undertakings (EAR magazine, sleep concerts, cowboy opera), reminds me of Cowell. During the question and answer session after his concert a speaker said that he did not consider what Richard presented to be music at all. Richard asked him what his definition of music was, and the man replied, "Why, we have a definition of music that is over three thousand years old!" This contrasts with an evolving definition of music and its relationship to noise that characterizes some features of twentieth-century composition in the United States and Europe.

Of all his composerly attributes it is Cowell's philosophy about world music that I most admire. Cowell sought to move beyond the idea that music may be only one thing, played only one way. He held classes in the intimate circular recital hall of the basement at the New School for Social Research in New York City. He called these meetings *Music of the World's Peoples* (also the title of a series of LP recordings he edited for Folkways Records: Folkways 4504, 4505, 4506, 4507 and 4508), and invited artists from non-Western cultures to discuss and perform their music. *World Music* is now a category used by music stores and journalists, defined popularly and certainly less inclusive of art music forms than Cowell intended.

As the world population comes closer together, news travels fast, cultural symbols move as quickly as satellites can beam them or modems stream them, and habits and customs are exchanged and intermingled. Pauline Oliveros (born 1932) draws upon Asian, Native American and Australian Aboriginal meditational practices in her *Deep Listening* music. Richard Kostelanetz (born 1940) combines the sounds of many languages in his textual audio art. With electronic sampling permitting analogues of musical instruments from many cultures, composers are creating a panoply of exotic and new timbres, such as Linda Fisher in her gamelan-like *Margaret in Bali*.

THE FRIENDLY INVESTIGATOR

Henry Cowell was a friendly investigator of possibilities. He did not follow all the paths he pointed out. As his wife Sidney Cowell once told me, her husband was so full of ideas that his problem was finding time to write them all down. Certain European composers in the past thirty years, including Witold Lutoslawski (born 1913), and György Ligeti (born 1923) in his *Lux aeterna* (1966) and *Volumina* (1961-1962, revised 1966), have created clusters by contrapuntal layering of adjacent tones. The remarkable keyboard music of Olivier Messiaen incorporates fingered secundal chords in simulation of the complex timbral calls of birds. In *New Musical Resources*, Cowell discusses applying overtone relationships to the elements of dynamic stresses, which creates its own rhythm, presaging the extreme dynamic structures of Boulez and Stockhausen. With the Rhythmicon, which Cowell helped invent in the thirties, he was able to play sixteen different rhythms at once. Now, with digital tracking and sequencing, rhythmic pattern overlays are unlimited. Cowell's rhythmic ideas are echoed in the cross-rhythms of Steve Reich (born 1936), who found inspiration in African drumming patterns, and in the polyrhythms of Philip Glass's (born 1937) music.

Henry Cowell considered the whole world of sound to be material for making music. The Whitney Museum of American Art, in collaboration with Klaus Schoening of Westdeutscher Rundfunk Cologne (West German Radio Cologne), held its first exhibition and performance festival of audio art in April, 1990. The works ranged from the random sounds of beans in a bowl (Alison Knowles) to road sounds depicting Kerouac's famous journey (Marjorie van Halteren) to variations on the last words of Native American Ishi (Malcolm Goldstein) to video/dancer/instrumental constructions on life cycle rituals (Sorrel Hays) to the Zen-inspired poetic

theater of John Cage. Cowell's efforts towards acceptance of our cultural plurality live on, as do his contributions to twentieth-century music.

Sorrel Hays, June 1992

Composer/performer ***Sorrel Hays*** *played the first two United States performances of Henry Cowell's* Concerto for Piano and Orchestra *in Omaha and New York City in 1978. Winner of the International Competition for Interpreters of New Music at Rotterdam, she recorded Cowell's piano music for Swedish, Dutch, German, Italian and Yugoslavian broadcasting stations. About her Finnadar recording of Cowell's music,* The Village Voice *exclaimed: "She can hammer out clusters like a wild animal.. and sound like a Chopin specialist at other points." Of her new music performances, she likes best the* Playboy *comment "...our favorite piano pit mechanic." Hays's* Sound Shadows *for sampling keyboard, didjeridu, dancer, oboe and video was commissioned to open the first Whitney Museum Sound Art Festival in 1990. Her musical use of regional dialect was subject of the documentary film directed by George Stoney,* Southern Voices: A Composer's Exploration, *awarded a blue ribbon at the 1985 American Film Festival. Ms. Hays grew up in Tennessee. She moved to New York City in 1969, and divides her time between studios there and in the remote woods near Tallapoosa, Georgia.*

Henry Cowell *Piano Music* Notes from the Original Release

These notes were the result of the efforts of several people, but primarily Sidney Cowell, starting with the second sentence.

The first piece on this recording is the earliest surviving (and still most often played) of Cowell's famous tone-cluster pieces—*The Tides of Manaunaun*. There are also examples of Cowell's exploration of the delicate end of the dynamic spectrum, written for the strings of the piano, and one piece, played with normal piano finger technique, that uses three different rhythms simultaneously throughout. Polytonality and atonality, dating from 1914, are also present in Cowell's work.

Tone clusters are groups of adjacent tones, three or more, up to twelve, played simultaneously. The term came from their appearance on the keyboard, where they must often be played with the palm, the side of the hand or the forearm. Outrageous as both term and technique seemed to most musicians when in 1923 Cowell first took his music to Europe, certain things in the pieces proved to be contagious among the more advanced European composers. By the middle of the century the term *tone cluster* was respectably ensconced in musical dictionaries in the chief European and Asian languages.

Cowell made his chords of massed seconds into a technical element for a compositional system, evolving a counterpoint and a harmony based on the interval of a second instead of a third. In his early piano music (mostly from the decade 1911-1921) these secundal chords are sounded as a unit along any chosen scale line—diatonic (*The Trumpet of Angus Og*, *The Tides of Manaunaun*), or pentatonic (*Amiable Conversation*, *Exultation*), or chromatic (*Advertisement*, *Antinomy*); moreover the clusters are used either homophonically (*Harp of Life*, *The Tides of Manaunaun*) or

polyphonically (*Dynamic Motion*, *Antinomy*) almost from the first.

The dissonant secundal technique that Cowell worked out for himself was not only surprisingly early, but quite different from the dissonant techniques developed by Europeans about the same time or a little later. By 1919 Cowell had completed a book on the subject, demonstrating the acoustical bases for the use of the second, in opposition to the then nearly universal musical assumption that the interval of a third was the only one acceptable to the ear. The book (*New Musical Resources*) goes on to discuss possibilities for tightening musical relationships by deriving the rhythm of a piece from its harmonic ratios. This is a concept arrived at independently among electronic composers in the 1950s.

Cowell has written chiefly for the symphony orchestra and for various chamber music combinations since the middle 1920s, but the same dissonant secundal technique found in his piano music can be traced in many different and elaborate developments, through his twenty-one symphonies and some forty other works of major proportions for various instrumental and vocal combinations. To mid-century ears, which by now have accustomed themselves to several aggressive kinds of dissonance, Cowell's secundal music no longer sounds as alarming as it did at first. Indeed, its presence in his orchestral music is often so delicately woven into the instrumental texture that the presence of tone clusters goes unnoticed by critics. In the 1950s a famous critic actually complained about the unfashionable melodic simplicity of the Irish

tone-cluster piano pieces, forgetting that twenty years earlier he had accused the same pieces of "shapeless cacaphony."

Two other aspects of Cowell's music, often commented on, can be found already evident in this early music. One is his penchant for modal melody, and the other is his interest in the music of distant cultures, chiefly East Asian. He was no more than thirteen when a neighborhood organist introduced him to the ecclesiastical modes, which offered a highly desirable extension of melodic patterns beyond the ubiquitous major and minor scales; only a little later came the discovery that the modes of East Asia were infinitely richer and more various. Growing up as he did in and around San Francisco, in the most acute poverty, and isolated from concert life entirely except for a single quartet concert and a single hearing of *Il Trovatore*, his musical environment consisted entirely of the Irish and middle western tunes his parents occasionally sang, and the music of Asian playmates. The few examples of European music he did hear never represented to him more than one among many possible musical influences, no more weighty in his development than the rhythm of trains or the inflections of human speech.

His parents' philosophical concern for independence and self-reliance in art as in every other aspect of life convinced Cowell very early that it was necessary to avoid writing anything like anybody else, so that it was with considerable difficulty that he was persuaded to study composition consistently. However, after he had written a hundred or more short compositions he began to feel the need for systematic ways of organizing and extending the new musical ideas that he found all around him. Charles Seeger, at the University of California in Berkeley, found him impervious at first to the suggestion that he should acquire the traditional contrapuntal and harmonic skills, but the idea that a consistent technique for composition could be developed, using the interval of a second that he found himself so greatly attracted to, appealed greatly to him at once. (Eventually he did undertake to master sixteenth- and eighteenth-century counterpoint and conventional harmony, of course; he also devoted the same length of time to studying the music of China, Japan, India and Indonesia with various native masters in Berlin and the United States.)

From this approach to the further orderly development of the musical ideas he was already using, it was only a single logical step to the notion that *any* musical materials might be the basis for a consistent technical style that would be quite different from that dictated by other kinds of basic materials.

A second fruitful idea the boy owed to Seeger was the suggestion that it is for the artist who inverts or appropriates new materials to establish a sound body of music using those materials—a mere demonstration of possibilities is not enough.

Having taken the whole world of music, in both time and space, for his own inheritance, Cowell has never seen greater virtue in any one style or period than in any other, except that he has often said that to make "personal expression" an artist's chief aim, in the manner of the nineteenth-century romantics, is inevitably crippling because it is limiting. Self-expression is something he feels may safely be left to take care of itself. "If a man has a personality of his own, I don't see how he can keep it out of his music," he once told an interviewer who expressed the usual alarm at the breadth of Cowell's musical interests. "And if he hasn't, how can he put it in?" the composer asked mildly.

It should not therefore be surprising that the manuscript of the earliest long work of Cowell's that has survived has a section entitled *Oriental*, which is a simple setting of a purely Japanese tune—not a traditional one to be found among Japanese, however, but, as is usual with Cowell, a tune in authentic folk style that he composed for himself. Today, one of his most famous orchestra pieces is a highly elaborate and subtle extension of Japanese music, *Ongaku* (1957); the composer describes it as written under the influence of "the sunny splendour of the music of old Japan."

SELECTIONS

1. The Tides of Manaunaun (c.1912)

The earliest surviving completed piece of Cowell's music is the first on the record, *The Tides of Manaunaun* (1911-1912). It was written in the winter of 1911-1912 in California, as a prelude to a pageant based on the Irish mythological poems of John O. Varian. Cowell first played the piece in public in San Francisco, on the day after his fifteenth birthday—March 12, 1912. Since its publication by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1922, it has been the most widely performed of the tone-cluster pieces. Margaret Nikoloric (who played it in New York before Cowell's own debut there) recorded it for Welte-Mignon player piano roll about 1925, as did Cowell later for Pleyel in Paris. Edwin Hughes played it for the informal gathering at the White House that followed Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inauguration in 1932, and it was on Percy Grainger's programs for several years. Rechristened *Deep Tides* by Stokowski, it became the first of the four *Tales of Our Countryside* (originally *Four Irish Tales*), orchestrated and performed by the composer with Stokowski's All-American Youth Orchestra on a Columbia release in 1941.

A simple modal melody is supported by one- and two-octave clusters, both chromatic and diatonic, sometimes arpeggiated.

Manaunaun was the Irish god of motion, who sent tremendous tides sweeping through the universe to keep its particles fresh until the time should come for the gods to make of them stars, seas, suns and worlds.

2. Exultation (1919)

This is the kind of walking-tune rhythm familiar in Ireland; it is in triple meter, so that the accent falls first on one foot and then on the other—the Irish consider us silly to walk to a tune that accents only the left foot, so that "one foot is worn out while the other is still perfectly good"! Both tune and accompanying clusters are pentatonic; metrically 3/4, 4/4, and 5/4 appear simultaneously, but the 3/4 remains uppermost; and the piece is in the form of a sonatina.

3. Harp of Life (1924)

According to Irish mythology, the god of life created a new living creature with each tone sounded on his great cosmic harp, a harp described as reaching from above heaven to beneath hell. Melodies and chords are simple; arpeggiated chromatic and diatonic clusters increase in breadth to build a series of climaxes culminating in some of the loudest music ever produced on a piano. This produced a series of jokes in the press, suggesting earmuffs be sold with concert tickets and foreseeing the construction of reinforced concrete pianos to withstand the onslaught of performers of this piece. Toward the end, chords are pressed down without sounding, to reinforce overtones by means of the strings thus released.

4. Lilt of the Reel (1925)

Small chromatic clusters and large diatonic ones accompany a tune whose modal character is borrowed from Gaelic music.

5. Advertisement (Third Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) (1914)

The style is dissonant and atonal. The first cluster is built up by adding single tones one by one, and they are then released one by one to make a diminuendo as the dampers eliminate each tone. The piece is a humorous impression of the repetitive advertising in the flashing lights of Times Square, and there is a section that may be repeated, to emphasize the absurdity, as many times as the performer likes.

6. Antinomy (Fourth Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) (1914, revised 1959)

Kant's *antinomies* were elements that seemed different but that could logically be shown to be identical—hence, a theme with variations, in music. There is a brief introduction in clusters, followed by a diatonic main theme that survives from Cowell's very first composition, an unfinished setting of Longfellow's *Golden Legend* begun when Cowell was eleven. The treatment is consistently polytonal, and massive clusters build to the broadest and loudest climax possible.

7. Aeolian Harp (1923) and **Sinister Resonance** (c.1930)

Aeolian Harp is sounded entirely on the strings of the piano. Chords are depressed silently on the keyboard to release their dampers so that when the strings are stroked only the tones so selected will sound. Single tones are plucked, *pizzicato*, as the proper key is depressed to free the string desired. The form is that of a prelude. The simple chord melody is sounded in several related phrases that are joined by the short pizzicato leading passages.

An aeolian harp is a tiny wind harp that children make of silk threads stretched across an arched twig like a bow. Hung in a windy spot, the silken strings give forth high, faint, indiscriminate sounds, loud or soft according to the force of the wind.

Although played on the piano keyboard, *Sinister Resonance* has an unusual tone quality because the strings are altered by various manipulations with the fingers. Different timbres and pitches are produced in the same way on the piano as they are on bowed instruments. Stopped tones are produced in the normal way that pitches are obtained on a violin or cello, by pressing the string against the fingerboard. Muted tones sound when a mechanical mute is added, limiting and altering vibration. Harmonics (overtones) are produced by stopping the string lightly at the proper node, or fractional point. The timbres thus produced on a piano are, of course, quite different from those produced by similar techniques on any other instrument. The form is that of a simple prelude, depending for contrast on tone quality rather than variation or development. When harmonics are used, the pitches are, of course, not those of the tempered scale. This piece, with some others in which Cowell used mechanical mutes or plectra, was a taking-off point for John Cage's explorations of prepared piano music, in which Cage fixed mechanical additions to alter timbre and pitch of various piano strings, "composing" his instrument as well as his music.

8. Anger Dance (1914)

Here Cowell uses the usual keyboard technique and the key of B minor; each phrase may be repeated many times, depending on how angry the player is able to feel. The composer went to consult a doctor about a violent muscle spasm that had doubled one leg back at the knee. The doctor brutally urged an immediate amputation, which he expected to carry out at once. Cowell stalked home indignantly on his crutches, his anger translating

itself immediately into this music in his head; he set it down right away just as it had come to him.

9. The Banshee (c.1925)

The performer stands at the tail of the piano to play this piece, which requires an assistant sitting at the keyboard to hold down the damper pedal, so that all the strings are released and can sound freely. The printed music explains the twelve ways of performing on the strings used here. All of these methods are applied to single tones and also to various kinds of chords, whether secundal or other. There are two themes, one of which is played on the strings rubbed lengthwise, the other played *pizzicato*. The form depends on dynamics and contrast in tone quality. These hitherto unused timbres are like some of those that began to be heard in electronic music in the 1950s.

A banshee is a fairy woman who comes at the time of a death to take the soul back into the Inner World. She is uncomfortable on the mortal plane, and wails her distress until she is safely out of it again. The older your family, the louder your family banshee will wail, for she has had that much more practice at it.

10. Fabric (c.1917)

Here the piano is played with the normal finger technique; three simultaneous rhythms throughout the weave of the fabric. The inner part, that always contains the main *andante* melodic line, is usually based on five beats to a measure, but sometimes it is three or four. The top line has either six or seven beats to a measure, and the lower line has either eight or nine. The form is that of a prelude. The three-part counterpoint is built on chords that are somewhat dissonant, as in music of the late nineteenth century, with some free dissonance as well.

11. What's This (First Encore to *Dynamic Motion*) (1914)

This is in an atonal, dissonant style, although not, of course, dodecaphonic. It features small clusters, sometimes in counterpoint with single tones.

12. Amiable Conversation (Second Encore to "Dynamaic Motion") (1917)

F-sharp pentatonic and C major diatonic scales are used simultaneously here; the piece is polytonal, but the melodies are simple and without modulation. The "amiable conversation" that suggested this gentle burlesque was a dispute overheard in a Chinese laundry. The four-tone inflections of Cantonese are audible, along with the increased tension that raised the pitch of the voices in argument. Similarly simple essays in the music of a great assortment of cultures are to be found in Cowell's music, no more frequent in the beginning than at mid century. Most (but not all) of these developed into larger constructions, with Western instrumentation and twentieth-century multi-level writing. These pieces are similar to (but not identical with) music that Japanese or Iranian or Indian composers make as they work at the problems of basing many-voiced twentieth-century music on the monodic styles of their own cultures. In Cowell's music the approach is the same, whether his take-off point is secundal chords or the melodic styles of Indian, Irish or Japanese music, or American folk hymnody.

This concept (and its multiple illustrations in Cowell's own music) is responsible for Cowell's influence on the composers of emerging nations in Asia and Africa. His aim has been to show how one may write "modern" music based on his own traditional inheritance, without going by way of France or Germany with their entirely different, and not universally applicable, aesthetic and technical principles. It seems to Cowell unnecessary to reject one's own folk or traditional inheritance because of its limitations: why should music the world over be all alike? Instead one can legitimately maintain the appeal of regional difference by expanding one's inheritance in a natural way by means of twentieth-century, but not essentially European or American, techniques.

13. Fairy Answer (1929)

One simple diatonic idea alternates on the piano strings and the piano keyboard. In Kildare there is a glen where, if one plays one's music at the end of it, the fairies will answer by playing theirs at the other end. If you are very materialist, of course, you will think it is an echo. But the fact is, the fairies change the music about just a little, and by that you may know that it is they themselves.

14. Jig (1925)

Jig is in the style of an Irish folk tune, with the same theme in major and then minor, joined by modal episodes.

15. Snows of Fujiyama (1922)

Pentatonic clusters follow a simple pentatonic melody to give a special tone quality. According to an old Japanese legend, what appear to be snows on Fujiyama are in fact the winged pure souls of maidens shed on the mountain at the approach to Nirvana.

16. Voice of Lir (1919)

Here Cowell uses both diatonic and chromatic melodies and clusters. At times a full octave of chromatic tones is played, and then all are released except the outside tones of the octave itself, giving a special *sforzando*. The composer made an Aeolian piano roll of this piece in the mid 1920s.

Lir of the Half-Tongue was father of the gods in Ireland. When he gave orders to the lesser gods for the creation of the universe he was only half understood due to his half-tongue. Therefore for everything that has been created there is an unexpressed and concealed counterpart, without which Creation remains incomplete. And that, say the Irish, is what is the matter with the world.

17. Dynamic Motion (1914)

This highly atonal piece is probably the first piece anywhere using secundal chords independently for musical extension and variation. Cowell employs both diatonic and chromatic clusters; keys are sometimes held down without sounding to amplify high, dissonant overtones. There are two main themes, one a melodic idea, the other a rhythmic one, each developed by using clusters.

18. The Trumpet of Angus Og (1924)

Diatonic and played on the white keys, *The Trumpet of Angus Og* is mostly in C major with some modal passages, and is in the form of a rondo.

Angus Og is the god of eternal youth in Irish mythology, charged with renewing the youth of the gods with the tones of his trumpet.

19. Tiger (c.1928)

In an atonal, dissonant style, this is a set of variations on two themes stated in the first few measures: one with small intervals, the other with widely separated intervals. There are many different kinds of clusters, some of which are used silently to bring out high overtones, as are also some small chords. The piece was originally suggested by William Blake's "Tiger, tiger, burning bright..."

20. Henry Cowell discusses the above works in the order in which they appear on the record.

OTHER COMPOSERS WRITE ABOUT COWELL

Cowell has often declared that nobody is so well equipped to understand what one composer is doing as another composer. So we conclude by quoting from other composers writing about him.

Virgil Thomson, 1953

"Henry Cowell's music covers a wider range both in expression and technique than that of any other living composer. His experiments, begun three decades ago in rhythm, in harmony, and in instrumental sonorities, were considered by many to be wild. Today they are the Bible of the young and still, to the conservatives, 'advanced...'

"No other composer of our time has produced a body of work so radical and so normal, so penetrating and so comprehensive... There is no other quite like it. To be both fecund and right is given to few."

Henry Brandt, 1957

"The debt of American music to Henry Cowell is large and substantial. He has had a major role in freeing our music from the slavish imitations of European models on the one hand, and a superficial, crude, and pretentious exploitation of native folk materials on the other; he is largely responsible for the acceptance today of experimental tendencies, which in his own music attain the convincing audacity which can proceed only from an authentic expressive need...and his hand has been a powerful one in shaping our musical culture into the self-sufficient entity which it is today."

Hugo Weisgall, 1959, 1962

"Since his formal New York debut in 1924, Henry Cowell has been a major creative force in American music. His musical gifts and the range of his energy, the scope of his music, the breadth of his influence and the recognition he has achieved, combine to make of him a figure a little larger than life, a kind of Paul Bunyan in music. Aside from his life as a composer, Cowell has lived several other full lives as champion of new music, impresario, performer, lecturer, critic, editor, teacher, and sponsor of the young...

"One cannot point to another composer on the American scene who has submitted himself with such confidence to the entire gamut of musical experience and who has created such an impressive amount of work embodying so many different kinds of musical ideas, techniques, and sounds...

"In an age beset by divisive forces, Cowell stands out as a genuine musical humanist."

The price of originality in an artist is inevitably isolation, but sometimes, if he lives long enough, he may find acceptance and even

welcome. So it is pleasant to report that, when the fiftieth anniversary of Henry Cowell's first performance of his own compositions came the day after his sixty-fifth birthday in 1962, the occasion was warmly celebrated by concerts and broadcasts organized by other composers and sponsored by a variety of musical organizations in New York and elsewhere about the country. Congratulatory messages and formal citations came from distinguished Americans, led by President Kennedy, Governor Rockefeller, and Mayor Wagner of New York. There was a retrospective exhibit of manuscripts, photos and memorabilia at the Music Division of the New York Public Library, and Frederick Ungar issued a reprint of a symposium that Cowell had assembled and edited in 1933, *American Composers on American Music.* A third Cowell recording appeared on the Louisville series (Symphony no. 15, *Thesis*). Columbia issued his String Quartet no. 5 (a Coolidge Commission) and the publication of several other records, including the original version of this one, was announced. The American Society of Composers and Conductors awarded Cowell the coveted Henry Hadley Medal for services to American music; the Society for Asian Music gave him a birthday party at Asia House in appreciation of his role as interpreter between East and West; and other medals, awards, and citations came from a variety of organizations in many parts of the world. These testified in an unprecedented degree to the breadth of Cowell's long influence and generous activity on behalf of twentieth-century music and musicians, as well as to the unqualified affection and admiration accorded him by those who care about music in the twentieth century and who took this opportunity to acclaim Cowell's unique and lasting contribution to it.

COWELL'S PIANO MUSIC IN PRINT

Two excellent and varied collections of Cowell's piano music are published by Associated Music Publishers, available from Hal Leonard, distributors, P.O. Box 13819, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53213. These Volumes I and II contain all the scores from this recording except *The Trumpet of Angus Og, Jig,* and *Fairy Answer.* Wherever special notation or directions to the performer are required the printed music includes them. As to whether anyone but the composer plays this music, the best evidence is provided by its continuing sales since Breitkopf and Härtel first published twenty-one of Cowell's piano pieces in 1922. An approximate tally to 1940 lists public performances of these pieces by more than 250 concert pianists in various parts of the world: Tokyo, Capetown and Bombay as well as Europe and the two Americas.

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FURTHER LISTENING

Cowell, Henry. "Saturday Night at the Firehouse." On *American Festival.* Lukas Foss conducts the Milwaukee Symphony. Pro Arte CDG 3102.

Cowell, Henry. *The Piano Music of Henry Cowell.* Doris Hays, piano. Finnadar SR LP 9016. Nineteen piano pieces, including the best-known cluster music.

Cowell, Henry. *Quartet Euphometric.* Emerson String Quartet. New World Records NWD LP 218-1.

Cowell, Henry. *Ostinato Pianissimo: For Percussion Ensemble.* Raymond DesRoches conducts the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble. Elektra-Nonesuch H 71291-4.

Cowell, Henry. *Hymn and Fuguing Tune no. 10 for Oboe and Strings.* Celia Nicklin with Neville Mariner conducting the orchestra of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Academy. ARGO CD 417818-2.

Cowell, Henry. *Pulse: For Percussion Sextet.* The Kroumata Percussion Ensemble. BIS CD 232.

Cowell, Henry. *Hymn and Fuguing Tune no. 2, Persian Set, Quartet no.2, Symphony no.7.* Sergey Koussevitzky conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra. CRI ACS-6005.

Cowell, Henry. *Six Ings Plus One, Invention, Episode.* Herbert Rogers, piano. Composers Recordings CRI SD 281.

CREDITS

Original recording produced by Peter Bartok, Moses Asch, Marian Distler and Sidney Cowell

Reissue supervision by Anthony Seeger and Matt Walters, with the assistance of Leslie Spitz-Edson

Introduction to the 1993 edition by Sorrel Hays

Original notes by Peter Bartok, Moses Asch, Marian Distler and Sidney Cowell

Original notes revised by Sorrel Hays

Editors: Anthony Seeger and Leslie Spitz-Edson

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Design by Carol Hardy

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Courtesy of Associated Music Publishers

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Folkways Records was founded by Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1947 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In the ensuing decades, New York City-based Folkways became one of the largest independent record labels in the world, reaching a total of nearly 2,200 albums that were always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987 to ensure that the sounds and genius of the artists would be preserved for future generations. All Folkways recordings are now available on high quality audio cassettes, each packed in a special box along with the original LP liner notes.

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For a free catalogue, write: The Whole Folkways Catalogue, Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, 955 L'Enfant Plaza Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. 20560, phone 202/287-3262, or fax 202/287-3699.

HENRY COWELL

PIANO MUSIC

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6. Antinomy (Fourth Encore to *Dynamic Motion*)
7. Aeolian Harp and Sinister Resonance
8. Anger Dance
9. The Banshee
10. Fabric

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15. Snows of Fujiyama
16. Voice of Lir
17. Dynamic Motion
18. The Trumpet of Angus Og
19. Tiger
20. Henry Cowell's Comments

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